

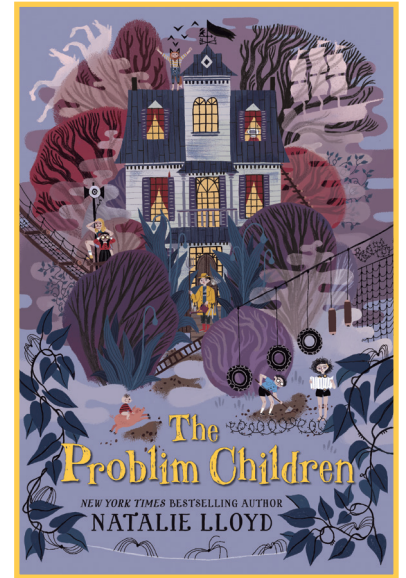
# The Problem Children

by NATALIE LLOYD

## EDUCATORS' GUIDE

### About the Book

The seven Problem children are living happily in the Swampy Woods under the care of their eldest sister, the perpetually happy Sundae. Then comes Kaboom Day—the day their house suddenly blows apart. The only thing to do is travel seven miles to the town of Lost Cove so they can reclaim the house of their Grandpa Problem, but when they reach the town they discover a (not-so) welcoming committee. A group of townspeople are waiting for the auction of Grandpa Problem's long-vacant house. Just in time, Sundae produces a key for the gate, and the seven siblings move in with all their quirky personalities, pets, and separate skills. However, their next-door neighbor, the dastardly Desdemona O'Pinion, is determined to get rid of the children and claim the house herself. What is her long-held grudge against the Problem family? How will the children defend their right to the home? And what is the real key to the mystery surrounding their family's past?



Art by Julia Sarda

Grades 3–7

### Discussion Questions

1. Why did people, other than the Problems, stay out of the Swampy Woods? What do you think the local people mean when they say, “That fog has teeth” (p. 3)? How could a place so wretched be a “private paradise” for the Problems?
2. Why do you think Thea and Wendell are worried about the number seven? What is the special connection between them that they call “heart speak” (p. 11)? How does it make them different from their siblings?
3. Discuss Thea’s question: “How could people hate you who barely even knew you? And what could they possibly hate?” (p. 58). What is causing the reaction of the townspeople to the Problem children?
4. The author tells you that House Number Seven was waking up after many years of sleep. What does she mean by a house being asleep? What are the indications that the house is waking up?
5. What do you think Mama Problem meant when she told her children to “look at someone heart-first” (p. 120)? Which characters in this story look at people heart-first and how does that affect their feelings for another person?
6. What is the special connection between Sal and Wendell? How do you think the quiet between the two brothers “allowed a special kind of space for wonder to bloom” (p. 125)? What other spaces in this story allow wonder to bloom?
7. Why do you think Violet is kept confined to her room? What makes her defy her aunt and leave the house to meet the Problem children? What part does their friendship play in unraveling the riddle? Why is Thea jealous of Violet at first?
8. What is the importance of the robot squirrel with the purple tail? Where did you think it came from when it first appeared? How do the children discover its secret? What does the word “animatronic” mean (p. 142)? Discuss the meaning of the riddle the children find in the squirrel.

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# EDUCATORS' GUIDE

9. Why do the Problim children decide to have a birthday party and invite the neighborhood when they are all feeling concerned about letting the people into their house? Discuss the phrase: "opening the door to your home is not so different than opening the door to your heart" (p.156).
10. How does Thea get the courage to visit Dorrie's cottage by herself? What does she learn from her visit to Dorrie? What feelings does she experience during that visit?
11. Compare the setting of Bagshaw Forest to the Swampy Woods. What do you think is the significance of the river that dried up and left a ravine? Do you think there is a connection in this description to the prologue at the beginning of the book?
12. Discuss the phrase: "... a problem was just a challenge" (p. 232). How does that statement reflect different ways the Problim children have met the difficulties they encountered throughout this story?

## Extension Activities

**What's in a Name?** Create a list of all the Problim children with their names, days of the week they are associated with, and their individual characteristics. How does the poem in the front of the book reflect their personalities? Research the meaning of your own name and write a paragraph about how your own personality reflects your name and the day of the week you were born.

**Lucky or Unlucky Sevens.** Make a list of all the ways that the number seven appears in this story. What is the significance of the number seven to the Problem children? Brainstorm with classmates other ways that the number seven is important in history, literature, and math. Research why the number seven is considered lucky.

**Venturing through a Victorian.** Look up information about Victorian houses: when they were built, what architectural features they had and how you might identify one. Draw a floor plan of the Problim house based on descriptions in the story. Draw a picture of the outside and grounds of the house based on descriptions in the story.

**Story Connections.** Make a list of parts of this book that remind you of old folk tales and fairy tales. Discuss how remembering a folktale can inform your feeling about a character or a situation in a new story. What feelings do you have for a character or situation in this book based on a story you already know from the past.

**What Comes Next?** When you finish this book, there are several clues to what might happen in a sequel as the Problim children continue to search for their grandfather's treasure. Write your own version of the first chapter of the next volume in the series. How do you think the children will follow the clues their grandfather has left for them? As you write, keep in mind the phrase: "a problem was just a challenge" (p. 232).



Courtesy Natalie Lloyd

## About the Author

NATALIE LLOYD loves writing stories full of magic and friendship, including *A Snicker of Magic*, which was a *New York Times* bestseller, and *The Problim Children*. She lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with her husband, Justin, and their dogs, Biscuit and Samson.